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ABSTRACT

In an effort to provide a platform from which all 108 California community colleges could address the problems and issues of grading policy, the California Community and Junior College Association developed and adopted an official position statement. The statement cites the need for flexibility within state regulations to allow for adjustments at the local level and outlines 11 recommendations for the development of state grading policies: (1) grades should encourage the professional evaluation of student performance, promote equal opportunity, and foster educational guidance; (2) assignment of grades should rest with instructors under the guidance of local boards; (3) grades should serve both the record-keeping needs of the college and the learning needs of the students; (4) minimum academic standards should be set for graduation, probation, suspension, and dismissal; (5) a system of progress probation should deter excessive withdrawals; (6) students should be able to repeat instruction or have access to remedial programs; (7) definitions of grading symbols should be clearly stated; (8) symbols for method of instruction should not be attached to course grades; (9) final grades should only be changed because of mistake, fraud, or incompetency; (10) proposed revisions of policies should be publicized; and (11) regulations concerning grade assignment should not be employed. (JP)

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CCJCA[1] Position Paper:

COMMUNITY COLLEGE GRADING POLICIES

The following statement was prepared by Commission on Instruction member Dr. Donald H. Scott, Long Beach City College, and presented by Dr. Barbara Mertes as Chairperson, CCJCA Commission on Instruction, to the CCJCA Board of Directors at their meeting March 8, 1980. Dr. Scott has worked with the writing of this statement since October of the year, and both the Commission on Instruction and the Commission on Student Services spent a great deal of time reviewing the drafts of the paper, recommending their approval in late February and authorizing Dr. Mertes to present the final document to the Board. This was done, and the statement was unanimously accepted by the Board on March 8. It is indeed a milestone paper, representing an important step toward providing a platform from which all 108 colleges in the California Community College system can address the problems and issues of grading policy. -- DSM

Cooperative Partnership

Education in California is founded on the concept that state and local levels of governance constitute a cooperative partnership with each one respecting the role of the other. The achievement of the state's objectives depends in a large measure on the joint efforts of state agencies and the local community colleges working in a common endeavor.

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[1]California Community and Junior College Association

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The strength of the community colleges rests fundamentally on their ability to adapt themselves quickly and effectively to the changing needs of the communities they serve. It is essential that state laws and regulations permit the colleges sufficient flexibility to make local adjustments in order to meet the diverse educational needs of their varied student populations.

Quality[2]

It is the position of the Association that state laws, administrative regulations and local rules governing community college grading policies should contribute to an effective education of the highest quality for students.

Laws, regulations, rules and policies governing the assignment and use of grades should encourage the professional evaluation of student performance and progress, reinforce academic standards, provide for equality of educational opportunity, and foster appropriate educational guidance.

Assignment

Responsibility for the assignment of grades to students rests in state law with instructors. Regulations and rules governing the assignment of grades should rely on the professional knowledge, training and expertise of community college faculties under the guidance of local administrative staffs and governing boards.

Purposes

The purposes and uses of grades are inseparable. Grades serve the needs of both the students and the colleges. They serve to motivate, evaluate, reward and guide students in learning the process. They are used by the colleges to award degrees, certificates, honors, scholarships and financial aid. They are used by administrators, counselors, researchers, other colleges, government agencies and prospective employers.

Grades are designed to indicate the results of an evaluation of the student's performance and level of achievement in comparison with established standards. They should be assigned with due professional regard for their accuracy, validity, reliability and objectivity and for the many uses to which they may be put.

Standards

The Association adheres to the principles established in the Education Code that the state should establish minimum academic standards relating to graduation requirements and to probation, dismissal and readmission policies and that district governing boards should establish standards not inconsistent with the minimum standards adopted at the state level.

The objective of encouraging students to make responsible use of a valuable and costly educational system is endorsed. Standards for graduation, probation, suspension and dismissal should be based on a satisfactory level of

[2]Topical "side heads" are included as a matter of editorial style for this publication only. They do not appear in the original document.

achievement. Rules in such matters should consider the quality of student performance, the number of units involved and the number of terms completed and be appropriate for part-time and intermittent students as well as full-time students.

Mission

The mission of the community college system is based on the concept of the "open door." Regulations governing admission and withdrawal should be in harmony with the basic principles of the system and the educational needs of students. Students who freely enter the community colleges should also be free, under local rules and procedures, to withdraw before the completion of the work of a course. Completed work should be formally evaluated according to established standards.

Regulations and rules should be designed to suspend or exclude only those who have demonstrated that they are unable or unwilling to profit from a community college educational experience. To that end, in addition to the traditional academic probation based on the level of achievement, the Association supports a requirement to provide for a system of progress probation for an excessive number of withdrawals.

Renewal

Students should also be free under educationally sound rules and procedures to achieve academic renewal, repeat instruction needed to achieve educational goals, take remedial and developmental courses, receive academic and career guidance and counseling, and change their objectives.

Although the Association supports the establishment of minimum statewide standards, it is opposed to the excessive use of loosely defined exceptions to restrictive rules. Such exceptions are subject to a wide variety of interpretations by individual colleges, administrators, faculty and students. They undermine established grading systems and set the stage for inevitable inequities.

Definitions

The Association supports the adoption of clearly stated definitions for grading symbols that are capable of objective interpretation and are applicable to all students equally in similar circumstances. The consistent use of such grading symbols and definitions focuses attention on academic standards expected of students, facilitates an accurate professional evaluation of student progress and performance, and serves to identify students who need academic assistance in reaching their educational objectives.

The following definitions are *recommended:*[3]

Symbol	Definition	Grade Points
A	Excellent	4
B	Good	3
C	Satisfactory	2
D	**Passing, less than satisfactory**	1

[3]Our italics.

CR	Credit (At least satisfactory; units awarded not counted in GPA)
NC	No Credit (Less than satisfactory or failing; units not counted in GPA)
I	Incomplete (Not counted in GPA)
IP	In Progress (Not counted in GPA)
RD	Report Delayed (Not counted in GPA)
W	Withdrawal (Not counted in GPA)

Symbols

The identification of the methods of instruction by attaching special symbols to course grades or by notations on the transcript is discriminatory and a denial of equity to students who transfer to other institutions. The indication of student competencies is far more important than the methods of instruction, especially at a time when innovative approaches to instruction are being developed.

Flexible methods of instruction now require an appropriate symbol such as "IP" (In Progress) for use with courses that cross end-of-term dates, with flexible calendar systems and with such innovative methods as self-paced instruction, modular learning programs, mastery learning, variable credit courses and special procedures for non-traditional students.

Students should be permitted one year in which to make up work to remove an "Incomplete". Grades for work that is still "Incomplete" after one year should remain on the record, but students should have an opportunity to repeat the course after the deadline has passed.

Changes

The determination of the student's grade by the instructor is required by law to be final and, therefore, constitutes a permanent record. Changes of final grades should occur only because of mistake, fraud, bad faith or incompetency. Procedures should be established for students to initiate requests for a change of grade based on these reasons.

All grading symbols placed on student records should be assigned by instructors and should be related to some aspect of student evaluation. Rules that directly involve non-instructional personnel in the assignment or correction of grades violate this principle. Regulations or grading symbols founded on financial expedience, to facilitate attendance accounting, or that take precedence over student needs are out of harmony with the principles established in law and with the fundamental mission of the community colleges.

Rules

Regulations and rules that inhibit the professional use of certain grades, that favor one class of students over another, that serve some purpose other than evaluation, or that impinge on the legitimate needs of students should be avoided. Although the effort to improve academic standards is always worthy of pursuit, attempts to make such improvements by regulations governing the assignment and use of grades are ineffectual at best and counterproductive at worst.

Gresham Butte

It is recognized that regulations and rules need adjustment from time to time to adapt them to changing conditions. Regulations governing grading policies and practices, however, constitute the most sensitive of issues and they must take into account the problems of achieving compliance. To be most effective, regulations and rules must reconcile basic educational principles, be in accord with the law, follow accepted traditions, and be appropriate for community college students. Rules and regulations are at their best when they elicit voluntary compliance.

Revisions

The Association advocates that any proposed revision of the regulations, rules and purposes governing grading policies be thoroughly publicized. It strongly recommends that they be given intensive study and extensive discussion over a sufficient period of time to achieve a workable consensus before adoption. The Association offers its cooperation to other statewide and regional community college associations and organizations in this endeavor.

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